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COMMENTARY
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Letters from Readers

Verification & Arms Control

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

... It is regrettable that Edward Jay Epstein ("Disinformation: Or, Why the CIA Cannot Verify an Arms-Control Agreement," July) does not mention the administration's proposal to the Soviet Union that we agree on cooperative measures of verification to supplement what are called "national technical means," i.e., satellite photography and electronic surveillance. The proposal was based on a full appreciation of the problem Mr. Epstein analyzes and other aspects of the verification issue. It was made in August 1981, and the Soviet Union accepted the principle in November both in Brezhnev's interview in *Der Spiegel* and through diplomatic channels. The issue is now on the agenda of all our arms-control negotiations with the Soviet Union.

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TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Edward Jay Epstein's article on disinformation is a welcome antidote to the glib assurances of unilateral disarmers and freeze advocates that American intelligence could easily detect Soviet cheating on a freeze agreement. But there are more specific limits to intelligence-gathering than the Soviets' expertise in feeding us what they want us to hear. ...

For example, it is simply not possible for a reconnaissance satellite to determine how many reentry vehicles a Soviet ICBM is carrying; the only way to discover this is to walk up to the missile, unzip its warhead, and count. Similarly, satellite pictures can tell us only that a new factory has been built; they cannot tell us what is being made inside. Again, only on-site inspection, continuous on-site inspection, can do the job.

Simple arithmetic shows the impossibility of even keeping track of

new industrial facilities in the USSR, let alone of figuring out what these facilities are producing. Let us assume, generously, that in one day a CIA analyst can examine photographs of 300 square miles, about the area of New York City. Even discounting two-thirds of Russia's 8.5 million square miles as unsuitable for secret installations, the CIA is left with a task that would require 10,000 or so photoanalysts. ...

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EDWARD JAY EPSTEIN writes:

Eugene V. Rostow is correct in pointing out that the means for verifying an arms-control agreement can be found if both sides agree to supplement conventional intelligence-gathering with "cooperative measures" such as on-site inspection and tamper-proof electronic sensors located in enemy territory. Despite the difficulties suggested by Michael Levin, it is a resolvable technical problem if it is in the interest of both sides to assure each other of compliance.

The argument I made was that U.S. intelligence, which seeks to intercept enemy data through spies, antennae, and satellites, is always vulnerable to being misled by disinformation. The risks of deception increase when the method of interception is anticipated, as is the case with satellites and other "national technical means," and when an adversary demonstrates that he has sufficient feedback from U.S. intelligence to manipulate it. Under such circumstances, U.S. intelligence cannot be relied on to monitor Soviet missile testing and deployment. If the situation is altered from hostile to cooperative, and the data are generated from U.S.-controlled sources in the Soviet Union, conventional intelligence becomes unnecessary—except as a redundant check. In this sense, the vulnerability of intelligence to deception is an argument for, not against, supplemental on-site arrangements.

Verification of a set of facts is only a narrow part of the issue of deception. Strategic deception aims at misleading the adversary's anal-

ysis of factual data—not necessarily at falsifying facts (especially those that might be exposed by enemy intelligence). In its most sophisticated form, disinformation makes available facts that are purposefully selected, shaded, and orchestrated to encourage an enemy to misinterpret a strategic design. The facts which an enemy is permitted to intercept and verify may thus result in reinforcing an inaccurate picture, one presumably disadvantageous to the adversary's course of action.

The real question that must be addressed, then, does not merely concern "cheating"—i.e., whether the limited data an adversary is supplying, or is permitting to be intercepted, are authentic or falsified—but strategic deception. This, in turn, requires reconsidering assumptions about Soviet strategic aims. Are they based primarily on an intercontinental-missile exchange with the United States? Or are they predicated on the neutralization, and domination, of Europe through intimidation? In the former case, Soviet strategy would aim at increasing the chances of a decisive first strike; in the latter case, Soviet strategy would aim at decreasing the chances of a successful American first strike in the event of crises in Europe. The stream of data available from arms-control monitoring would enhance the latter strategy at the expense of the former. In focusing too intensely on the narrow issue of compliance, there may be a tendency to neglect the question of how the treaty itself fits into the jigsaw of Soviet strategy.

It will be recalled that in the late 1930's Hitler permitted, and indeed invited, Western visitors to "on-site" inspections of Luftwaffe bases and factories—and to observe the performance of planes at air shows. The observable "facts" about speed and production efficiency were quickly passed on to British and French leaders, and they helped reinforce the exaggerated image of the threat of German strategic bombing. What the West did not learn from these "facts" was that Hitler's strategic design for taking over Austria and Czechoslovakia depended on intimidating the Western allies into appeasement by misleading them about the capabilities of the Luftwaffe to bomb London and Paris. Hitler's deception worked not because Western intelligence failed to gather "facts" about the Luftwaffe, but because the subsequent analysis failed to relate them to Hitler's strategic design.